



Route 66 Preservation – Success through Partnerships



Route 66 Corridor Preservation Program

By Michael Taylor, Program Manager, Route 66 Corridor Preservation Program

As we head into the fourth year of the National Park Service Route 66 Corridor Preservation Program (NPS), we have an opportunity to reflect on what has been accomplished during the first three years. There is much to celebrate! From the enabling legislation of 1999 (Public Law 106-45), an effective program of cost-share grants, technical assistance, and clearinghouse functions has developed. Together with our partners, tremendous steps have been taken toward raising awareness of the value and significance of Route 66 to America, and toward preserving its rich legacies. Through the NPS program, 35 preservation, planning, research, and educational projects either are underway or completed—projects that otherwise may never have occurred. Individuals, organizations, and government agencies are all realizing the benefits of preserving not only the memory of, but also the tangible links to the historic highway. As a result, we are increasingly joining forces across the road's 2,400 miles to preserve the highway for the collective benefit of current and future generations who live on, travel over, and learn from it.

After three years of diligent work and collaboration, our partners have much to be proud of. We want to share examples of the types of successes that are being realized up and down the route with you. For starters, we will read an excerpt by David Knudson, Director of the National Historic Route 66 Federation, who provides us with some background on the public and federal

involvement that has helped stimulate preservation along the route.

Then we will read three case studies in which partnerships between the NPS and interested parties resulted in preservation projects that not only have restored historic properties for our enjoyment and edification, but also have stimulated pride, and economic growth in several Route 66 communities. While only three projects are showcased here, there are many other stories to be told, and many more yet to unfold.

And while these successes must be celebrated, we also know that there are miles and miles of work still to be done. For, while the number of success stories steadily grows, the number of threats that face the road continue to grow as well. The historic buildings, bridges, road segments, and businesses that line the 2,400-mile route continue to face closure, vacancy, demolition, and other challenges. Our collective efforts to protect and support the route's legacy are much needed, and their far-reaching effects cannot be underestimated.

Through our continued work and partnerships, we will strive to bring more and more success stories to fruition. For more information about the National Park Service's Route 66 Corridor Preservation Program, our partners, and the route itself, please visit our website at www.cr.nps.gov/rt66.

Building Partnerships

The National Park Service's Route 66 Corridor Preservation Program actively seeks the participation of partners for prioritizing and accomplishing program goals and preservation of the route. Partners include local, state, federal, and tribal governments; Route 66 associations; non-profit organizations; private property owners; and other invested stakeholders. To date, the program has developed numerous working relationships with partners along the route, through individual and community outreach, working meetings, and a cost-share grant program. In addition, a Route 66 Federal Advisory Committee is being developed, which will provide a forum for diverse interests to discuss issues and advise the National Park Service on Program matters and Route 66 preservation priorities.



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The Route 66 Corridor Preservation Program is administered in partnership with tribal, federal, state, and local agencies; non-government organizations; and private landowners.

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The National Park Service regularly meets with partners to share information, and to hear interests and concerns about preserving historic Route 66.

Preservation Advocacy on Route 66

By David Knudson, Executive Director, National Historic Route 66 Federation

When we began the National Historic Route 66 Federation nearly a decade ago, the idea of preserving and restoring 2,400 miles of old road lined with deserted gas stations, crumbling cafes, and looted motels seemed, at best a pipedream, and at worst, impossible. Actually, many skeptics wondered why we would even bother trying. At that point, Route 66 was a distant memory to many of us over the age of 30, and somewhat unfamiliar to more recent generations.

Clearly, we knew that if we were going to have any success at all, we would have to begin the process on three fronts: First, we would need to develop a viable, nationwide, nonprofit organization to help manage the effort. Second, we would have to involve the government in our plans—no single organization would be able to fund all the needy preservation projects. And third, we would need to launch a publicity campaign to raise awareness about the importance of preserving the route, and how it could increase tourism, and stimulate local economies.

As our publicity campaign started spreading around the world, it became evident that we had awakened a sleeping part of America's heritage. It was as if a light had been turned on that blinked, "Remember the adventures of Route 66." Those ramshackle buildings began to be viewed as icons of a bygone time, and an important part of our history. Hits on our website grew from several a day to more than 1,000 a day.

During these early federation years, we worked with congressional members to develop grassroots support for a preservation bill. Spearheading this effort, we were able to bring together a letter-writing campaign by our more than 1,800 members and hundreds of other supporters.

After a concerted effort lasting over nearly a year, the bill was signed into law in 1999. \$10 million was authorized to be appropriated over 10 years, and the National Park Service's Route 66 Corridor Preservation Program was established to review, administer, and issue matching fund grants to worthy projects. While only \$1 million has actually been allocated since then, these funds have been put to good use, helping to revitalize and preserve the route. The route needs the dollars badly to keep the momentum going, because there are many eager citizens and communities who are hoping to benefit from this assistance.

Over the decade, the federation, NPS staff, local, state, and national partners, and advocates from around the world are resurrecting this important piece of our heritage. Today, properties up and down the route are slowly being restored, revitalized, and put back into service. Thousands of tourists come from virtually all foreign countries just to experience the most legendary road in the world. With them come millions of dollars spent on plane fares, auto rentals, lodging, dining, gifts, and essentials. Most of them have the same franchise operations at home, and even the same theme parks, that we do. But none of them have magical Route 66.



The Wigwam Motel in Holbrook, Arizona, received NPS cost-share grant funds in 2003 to help toward the restoration of the neon sign and concrete teepees.



NPS PHOTO

Rock Cafe exterior, before restoration.

Rock Cafe

By Dawn Welch, owner, Rock Cafe

The Rock Cafe is located in Stroud, Oklahoma, on Route 66. This is a small community of 2,500, and as one could guess, it is always struggling economically. I have owned the cafe for 10 years and witnessed every food business in Stroud close or change hands, including our chains. I was really excited when the buzz began on the possibility of grant money for historic properties along the road. The cafe at the time was in a real slump from a devastating tornado that ripped away all the good jobs from Stroud. My husband and I debated long and hard about the possibility of selling the business. We knew for sure that if we kept the cafe, a remodel would be necessary.

We started making calls to the National Historic Route 66 Federation to inquire about the grant rumors. We were given enough hope that the federal government was definitely going ahead with this program, and that it would be administered through the National Park Service. We were also told that listing the building on the National Register of Historic Places would increase our chances for grant funds. We began to seek assistance from the Oklahoma State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO). It was quite a struggle for two people with no experience, but our SHPO was extremely patient and helpful through the process, and our building got listed on the register. Soon after, the National Park Service announced that cost-share grant funds were available to those who were interested in applying for them.

I had already met the staff of the NPS, who had beaten a path down the Mother Road. They were aware that I was chomping at the bit to be one of the first to get a project moving. When a cost-share grant application finally arrived in the mail, I contacted the NPS and the SHPO, who would both turn out to be extremely helpful and encouraging in helping me work through the requirements. I have told anyone with complaints about paying taxes that I've more than used my tax dollars, and some of theirs, with the wonderful resources available to me through these programs.

Scared at the time to invest my half of the project cost (\$35,000), I have found that the investment has been successful. The business has flourished, and my community is very proud of the Rock Cafe. The city uses it as a main attraction on their website. We have been able to use the cafe for many local car shows, motorcycle rallies, and other groups that bring tax dollars that would not have been there if the Rock didn't do this remodel. The benefits to my community are far too great to keep mentioning, but for those interested, please don't hesitate to contact us through the NPS. The NPS cost-share contribution was close to \$35,000 (not to mention the person-to-person care from NPS and SHPO), and I would like to say thanks to everyone involved for making this possible for a small, but not forgotten, place in Oklahoma.



BY KATHERINE MONTGOMERY

The Rock Cafe food counter after restoration.



COURTESY OF DAWN WELCH

Early photo of Rock Cafe food counter.

Standard Oil Gas Station

By Jeff LaFollette, President, Illinois Route 66 Association



The station in 1998, before restoration.



The station during its heyday in 1939.

In 1997, the historic Standard Oil Gas Station in Odell, Illinois, was literally sinking into decay, until the Preservation Committee of the Illinois Route 66 Association noticed it and decided to do something about it. From the beginning, they knew their work was cut out for them. For starters, the roof was leaking, the south-west corner of the building had sunk 14 inches, and the wiring was defunct. People in Odell and within the association wondered why in the world we would pour our time, monies, and energies into such a decrepit structure, but the Preservation Committee had a vision.

First, they worked out a deal to place ownership of the station into the hands of the Village of Odell. In return, the preservation committee promised to help raise money for restoration. Then the committee worked to nominate the station to the National Register of Historic Places, and got it listed in 1998. The following year, the association conducted a Poker Run, with the hope of raising \$2,500 for the restoration project. The run was so successful that over \$10,000 in cash was raised, and another \$5,000 worth of items were donated for display. In 2000, a second poker run was conducted, and another \$5,000 was raised.

Now, with money available, and association members clamoring to donate work time, the project was underway. With many weekends of volunteer time, the station began to take back its historic appearance.

It was during this time that the Hampton Inn contacted the association to offer assistance through their "Save a Landmark" program. Hampton provided 25 volunteers and \$7,500 to help paint, plant trees and shrubs, and clean the inside of the service bays.

The Illinois State Historic Preservation Office and the Village of Odell also applied to the National Park Service Route 66 Corridor Preservation Program for funding. With the village's cash match of \$7,500, the National Park Service provided an additional \$7,500 to complete interior repairs to the office; install a furnace; and repair the original service bay doors.

The station is now a visitor center, and one of the most photographed spots along Route 66. Many travelers stop there daily. While they are in town, they stop at shops and businesses in downtown Odell, whether they are just buying a cold drink, or picking up Route 66 merchandise. These travelers also provide continued support for the station through the purchase of T-shirts, hats, and cash donations. The Route 66 Association of Illinois continues to work with the Village of Odell to make sure the station will continue to be protected and preserved. Together, these collective efforts have helped ensure that the Standard Oil Gasoline Station in Odell will have a long and prosperous future as a tangible link to historic Route 66.



The Standard Oil gas station, after restoration.



NPS PHOTO

The Sun 'n Sand neon sign after restoration.

New Mexico Neon

By Johnnie Meier, President, New Mexico Route 66 Association

On Route 66, neon signs were the candy-colored beacons that attracted tourists to the curio shops, motels, cafes, and roadside attractions. Over the years, these classic signs have become icons and achieved recognition as outstanding examples of American folk art. However, over time, many of these once-beautiful signs had faded and gone dark.

The New Mexico Historic Preservation Division recognized the cultural significance of these neon signs, and proposed a restoration project that was funded by the National Park Service Route 66 Corridor Preservation Office. In a competitive process, the New Mexico Route 66 Association was chosen to lead the project.

The initial \$50,000 seed money supplied by the NPS was supplemented by a variety of sources, including funds from neighborhood development groups, city governments, and in-kind donations. In addition, the neon sign contractors acknowledged the heritage of these signs and agreed to work on the projects as partners to maximize cost effectiveness. Although the contract specified that five neon signs were to be restored, the Association restored nine signs as the result of creative resource management and partnerships.

Restoration applications were reviewed by a select panel of nationally recognized experts.

Three signs were restored in Tucumcari; the TePee Curio Shop, the La Cita Restaurant, and the Paradise Motel. In Santa Rosa, the imposing Sun 'N Sand Motel sign was restored, and in Moriarty, the fantastic UFO-like rotosphere is in orbit at the historic El Comedor Restaurant. In Albuquerque, the animated Aztec Motel sign was restored, along with the neon cactus at the Westward Ho! Motel. The storm-fallen Grants Café sign was renewed, while in Gallup the elegant Lexington Hotel sign now shines proudly.

The project has attracted local and national media attention, including the production of a 30-minute documentary for PBS. The project was cited as an example of Best Practices by the National Scenic Byways organization and awarded the "2003 Outstanding Restoration Project" by *Route 66 Magazine*. The Westward Ho! Motel was used for location filming by two Hollywood movies in 2003. The producers were attracted to the property by the restored neon sign.

The project has reignited interest in heritage tourism on Historic Route 66, and has resulted in renewed pride and follow-up investments by business owners and their communities.



BY JOHNNIE MEIER

Paradise Motel neon sign after restoration.



BY JOHNNIE MEIER

Westward Ho! Motel neon sign after restoration.